

Myths, Monsters, and Mayhem: The Changing Image of Vampires

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurie Lindberg". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the printed name of the thesis advisor.

**Ball State University**

**Muncie, Indiana**

*May 2013*

**Expected Date of Graduation**

*May 2013*

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Author's Statement .....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>What is a vampire?</i> .....	2
<i>Characteristics of Vampires</i> .....	3
How to Create a Vampire.....	3
How Vampires Feed.....	4
The Invitation .....	5
What do Vampires Look Like?.....	6
Preternatural vs. Supernatural Powers.....	7
Protection and Prevention .....	8
Killing the vampire.....	9
<b>Myth, Monster, and Mayhem .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<i>Myth: Cultural Representations of the Fiend</i> .....	10
Eastern Europe.....	11
<i>Monster: the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature of the Vampire Craze</i> .....	15
John Polidori's <i>The Vampyre</i> .....	15
Sheridan le Fanu's <i>Carmilla</i> .....	18
Bram Stoker's <i>Dracula</i> .....	20
<i>Mayhem: The Modern Vampire in Literature and film</i> .....	25
Modern Literature .....	25
<i>Pop Culture</i> .....	37
Movies .....	38
Television .....	40
Modern Vampirism .....	42
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Works Cited .....</b>	<b>45</b>



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## Abstract

Vampires are common literary characters that have their origins in mythology. In this thesis, the many characteristics of vampires will be examined. Also, Eastern European mythology will be studied to explore the different images of vampires across cultures. Literature from the 19<sup>th</sup> century is influential in the shaping of the image of the vampire. This literature also provides a foundation for other authors to build upon this image. Contemporary literature is also examined for additions or changes to the image of vampires. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, television and film became media for telling vampire stories, which allow for actions and visual images to be used to create a complete image of a vampire. Finally, the impact of vampire literature and film on pop culture is discussed.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I must thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Laurie Lindberg for her support in my ambition to complete this project. She trusted me to complete my work and allowed me to ramble on and on about the interesting facts that I found while researching. It is due to her guidance that I gained the confidence I needed to successfully complete my project. I honestly could not have asked for a better adviser.

I also need to thank my family for fostering my love of reading. It is due to their support and encouragement that I even felt I could begin to attempt such a massive project. Without your love, I could not have done it.

## Author's Statement

When I Googled the term “vampire” I received millions of results in return. Similar numbers will be given if “vampire films” or “vampire literature” is searched. Vampire literature is something that I have been exposed to for the last several years and it never ceases to be entertaining. Setting out to complete this project, I thought it important to explore the history of vampires. Once I started my research, I understood the massive undertaking that I was committed to completing.

Finding a starting place was difficult, but I decided to start with listing the many characteristics that are given to vampires, followed by the Eastern European myths that shaped today's ideas of vampires. I looked into other continents and their vampires, but the absolute magnitude of how many myths originate in Eastern Europe is staggering. Therefore, I decided to begin with those myths.

The mythology of the vampire was not the only important subject to me. I also needed to read both the earlier literature and the current literature comprising vampire novels. I believe that vampire literature is a subgenre of the horror genre. So I needed to look for stories that included both genres.

I began by reading the novellas of *The Vampyre* and *Carmilla* as well as the original vampire novel *Dracula*. From there I found a foothold on why these first tales are important. John Polidori, Sheridan le Fanu, and Bram Stoker had to do a lot of research on the mythology of the vampire and their works can be considered investigative literature. It is from these that all of the current media found its basis.

Choosing modern novels to read was very difficult because the subgenre has grown a lot in the last eight decades. As a Saint Louis native, I dutifully read the *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series. The stories were familiar to me because I have been rereading them for the past year. The other stories I chose were *Twilight* and *Interview with the Vampire*. *Interview with the Vampire* was a new book to me and I found it fit my idea of a classic piece of literature. It was like picking up an old friend and seeing him or her again for the first time.

From reading I moved to watching hours of film and TV to obtain another perspective. It was easier to be critical about some films than others. I wanted to explore the idea of what is a vampire, but some of the ideas presented in TV and film did not satisfy my thirst for knowledge because of the time limitations placed on TV shows and films.

It was with great excitement that I sat down and began writing, first about traits and the mythology of vampires and then comparing what I had found in the first fictional literature containing the myths. Myths are stories and superstitions that were passed on to new generations by word of mouth until they were written down. I continued by comparing what I saw in the modern pieces to what I saw in *Dracula*. The topic made for a fun exploration of literature and the human imagination.

While writing, I enjoyed explaining and describing the different aspects of vampires that I had discovered for the first time. I was able to write the majority of this thesis in a short amount of time and I am surprised at the amount of information that I wished to convey. I did have some trouble with deciding how to summarize or explain certain novels. For example, the *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series is twenty-one books long. An entire thesis could be written about that series alone based on the entire world that Laurell K. Hamilton has developed, and it was a

challenge to figure out what to include in my thesis. In the end, I decided it was best if I chose details that were different from what I gathered from *Dracula*.

The long hours that I spent working on my original draft sometimes caused me to make fun of some of my research more than others (for example, I found *Twilight* to be quite silly), leaving me to laugh at myself and continue writing. When I completed my first draft, I was relieved that I had completed the most difficult task in this undertaking. I was amazed at the number of pages that I had written. My first draft was fifty-one pages and I was nervous about editing such a lengthy draft. After a meeting in which Dr. Lindberg and I discussed revisions, I was less worried and more excited about finishing this project.

While writing, I learned how my writing process has changed since I started college. When I was a freshman I preferred to write papers in a single sitting. I would write an outline and then write the paper. For my thesis, I spent around a week working on my outline. It was really important to me that I visualized everything that I wanted to write about. My outline ended up being around six pages due to its thoroughness. When it came time to write, I organized all of my research and tackled the paper section by section. I made sure that I wrote about all of the information that I had collected. If I had the opportunity to do anything differently, I would have spent more time on the mythology section. I really would have liked to explore more countries' vampire mythology.

## Introduction

The concept of the vampire is a unique and thrilling idea. Vampire legends and myths are prominent all across the world and come in many variations. There are some myths in which the vampire is portrayed as a floating head with trailing entrails and there are others in which the vampire is beautiful and seductive. Prominently from Eastern Europe, tales of this mystical creature have risen, authors have created stories that have thrilled generations of readers.

According to legends compiled by Claude Lecouteux, vampires are creatures that live on the essential life essence of humans. The most common life essence is blood. In multiple myths, vampires live on other essences, like the souls of their victims. The vampire belongs to a specific group of revenants, a revenant being a corpse that has been reanimated through a mystical force. Some revenants have a purpose for which they are raised and some do not. What sets vampires apart from other revenants, like zombies and ghouls, is the manner of the death of the person and circumstances surrounding it. However, there has been some evidence that the term “vampire” may have originally been used to describe all types of revenants, rather than a specific type of revenant (58).

There are many other characteristics that are attributed to vampires besides consuming of humanity’s vital substances. Other common characteristics include preternatural or supernatural abilities, such as super strength, hypnotism, levitation, and metamorphosing. The difference between preternatural and supernatural is the origin of the ability. Preternatural abilities refer to heavenly or hellish powers that are beyond natural explanation, but are still plausible. Supernatural powers are abilities that have god-like tendencies, where there is not a natural explanation for the ability. Both preternatural and supernatural abilities have been attributed to vampires.

Common in vampire theories and legends is an explanation OF how one would protect oneself in the event of a vampire attack. Myth tells us of many rituals that protect the home, the birth of an infant, and the dead. Legends also tell us the best ways of killing a vampire and preventing it from healing itself.

From Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight Series*, readers have been entertained for centuries by vampires. It is unclear where these creatures originated from, but looking at what they have become in the late twentieth to the twenty-first century is intriguing. The imagination of screenwriters and authors was released and the vampire has entered pop culture. Movies and TV shows have been created from many different literary novels and book series. A recent HBO Series, *True Blood*, highlights different ways a vampire can feed and the brutal vitality that is a vampire's heritage. Through reading multiple modern novels and watching different movies and TV series, a person can see clearly how the lines of what a vampire is have blurred throughout the use of this horror-inducing device in popular culture.

### *What is a vampire?*

Vampires are often thought of only as blood sucking creatures of the night. People forget about other aspects of this monster in favor of the most basic representation of the image. The word "vampire" is a historical term used to describe any revenant (Lecouteux 46, 58). A revenant is any creature that is the corpse of a human that has been reanimated due to a supernatural force. Examples of revenants are zombies, ghouls, and vampires. It was not until later that the term *vampire* was used to describe a specific type of revenant.

Just as there are many different types of revenants, there are different types of vampires. These vampires have specific nicknames and often are a result of myths. Some common names of vampires include *varkolac*, *vourdalak*, and *nosferatu* (Lecouteux 78-81). Each different myth



defines vampires in different ways, but each one devours the life force of human beings. This life force can be blood or it can literally be their life. Some specific vampires can extract life force from the grave and others must visit the house of a loved one. Vampires across mythology have a broad spectrum of abilities.

### *Characteristics of Vampires*

#### **How to Create a Vampire**

The basis of most of the vampire's characteristics is superstitions. These myths can also be thought of as folk tales used to describe why strange and magical occurrences might have happened. For example, people believed that events occurring around the time of death are very significant as to whether or not a person will rise again as a revenant.

It seems clear that superstitions that arose from myths tell us that if certain events were to happen, the corpse of a human would rise as a revenant (Lecouteux 48). Such instances when a person would turn into a revenant is if an animal were to cross the corpse as it is prepared for burial or if the person had been born with a caul or swallowed their amniotic fluid. (Lecouteux). Other explanations of who could become a vampire are based on characteristics of the people themselves. The people who are potential vampires are redheads, brothers born in the same month, werewolves, evil doers, hanged men, those who never ate garlic, those who have the evil-eye, and those sworn to the devil's service (Lecouteux 49).

If we look at literature across the times, we find that there are many different ways of creating a vampire other than these predictors for possible vampires. A look into the world of *Twilight* shows that vampires carry venom that, when introduced to human cells, alters them and turns them into stronger, immortal cells. In other novels, the victim must be visited or bitten an



exact number of times within a specific time span in order to be turned into a vampire. An example of this is in *Dracula* when Count Dracula visits Lucy nine times and turns her into a vampire. A common approach to the making of vampires is through an exchange of blood. In Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, the narrator of the story vividly explains how he was drained of blood and forced to drink the blood of his "maker." This is the most common approach to the creation of vampires.

### **How Vampires Feed**

Myths give people a large amount of information and with this information comes imagination. The human mind can create so many different possibilities to explain what we see but cannot explain. How the first storytellers described the ways that vampires can feed is a great example of the human imagination.

By looking at what can be called a "predecessor" of a vampire, audiences can narrow down traits that exist through the myths that pertain to the specific revenant. One such predecessor is the *appesart*. This demon is a product of pure fear and absorbs the life forces of humans (Lecouteux 67). Another predecessor that devours the life force of humans is the "chewer". This revenant would chew items placed in its grave until it no longer required sustenance.

A more familiar food source is human blood. Vampires tend to be secretive and careful about how they eat. Some choose to seduce and some choose to hide in the shadow until the moment comes to strike their victims. In the tale of *Dracula*, the character John Harker visits the Count and during his long stay never sees the fiend eat. The secret life of the vampire is often a motif in novels and short stories. The bite is the most characteristic way to identify a vampire's victim. Some vampires have canine teeth that extend when they are prepared to feed (*True*

*Blood*). These are called “blood teeth.” A characteristic of these teeth is that they are razor sharp and cut through the skin easily to create an easy access to the blood. Once the blood is flowing, the vampire will drink and gain vitality from the victim. In many myths, the victim is a relative or loved one of the vampire.

### **The Invitation**

“You may come in.” The invitation. Without one, vampires may not enter a human’s dwelling. This is seen in many modern takes on vampire tales like *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer*, *True Blood*, *Anita Blake: The Vampire Hunter* novel series, and many others. The question that must be asked is how do vampires procure an invitation?

The “knocker” is a predecessor of the vampire that rose and knocked on the door of a house (Lecouteux 55). By knocking on doors, this type of revenant could obtain passage into the house and consume the sustenance that it needed. There are other variations on this type of revenant, and in literature it is common to see vampires needing permission to enter a human dwelling. For example, Dr. Van Helsing, a vampirologist in *Dracula*, mentions that the Count needs permission to enter the residence of Lucy Westenra. Other tales sometimes imply the need for an invitation, but fail to make it clear as to when it was obtained.

Stories may tell people that vampires require an invitation to enter a human’s home; however, removing them from the home once an invitation has been given is a debated topic. In some tales, like *Dracula* or as seen in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, an invitation cannot be rescinded. The only way to prevent a vampire from returning to the home is to place ritualistic items by the windows and doors of the home. In *Dracula*, Dr. Van Helsing directs all of the other characters to cram garlic into every tiny nook and cranny in Lucy’s bedroom to prevent the vampire from entering the room again. This is A laborious task and many other authors have

chosen another method to prevent a vampire from returning. In the *True Blood* TV series, the answer to this dilemma is simply to rescind the invitation and the vampire is expelled from the house by some form of metaphysical power. After this, the vampire must once again obtain permission to enter the human's residence.

### **What do Vampires Look Like?**

The appearance of the vampire differs greatly depending on the myth or story. In some myths, the vampire looks exactly like what it is: a reanimated corpse. In some novels, the vampire's form appears to be a more beautiful version of its human body (*Twilight*) or exactly as it did in life (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series). One common trait within the different ideas of the vampire form is how the appearance of the vampire is correlated with its feeding habits. Count Dracula appears as an older gentleman at the beginning of the novel, but after glutting himself on blood his appearance is years younger and much more seductive. This is an excellent example of how the liveliness that a vampire has is directly related to the quantity of blood in his diet. In other novels, blood-deprived vampires shrivel up and become shells of what they once were, all beauty lost until they feed again.

Due to a lack of sunlight in the lives of most vampires, their skin is paler than that of humans. In some cases the otherworldly beauty of the vampire makes it look as though its visage has been cut from stone. Another common characteristic is the coloring of a vampire's eyes. In many cases vampire's eyes are described to be as red as the blood they drink. In other cases, a vampire's eyes will remain the same color as when the vampire was human. Vampires can also be identified by their teeth. In some instances the teeth are retractable to make their appearance more like that of a human. In cases where they retract, they come forth again when it is time for

the vampire to feed. Vampires whose teeth do not retract must make excuses for the appearance of their pointy teeth.

### **Preternatural vs. Supernatural Powers**

Preternatural and supernatural powers are often thought to be the same thing. However, there is a difference between the two. Preternatural is defined as going beyond natural powers. Examples of this are super strength, night vision, etc. Supernatural is defined as something that is not of the natural world and is often related to a deity. Examples of supernatural powers are those of raising the dead, telepathy, etc. Vampires have been identified as having both types of powers. Every vampire that has been researched and written about in literature contains some sort of preternatural ability. An excellent book series that shows the difference between the two is the *Twilight* series. The vampires in this series all have the preternatural powers of superhuman strength and senses. Many of the vampire characters have an extra supernatural ability like mind reading and seeing the future. Both of those last two are excellent examples of supernatural abilities.

Looking at the original *Dracula*, it is a little bit more difficult to think of supernatural abilities, but the Count does have one. It is his affinity with certain animals and the anamorphic abilities he possesses that makes him supernatural. When John Harker visits Castle Dracula he is attacked by wolves that are later drawn away. Subsequently it is revealed that Count Dracula has an affinity with the wolves. He also has the ability to transform himself into a bat. This is seen when Dr. Van Helsing takes precautions against Dracula entering Lucy Westenra's room, so Dracula transforms himself into a bat and flings himself against the shutters. The effort is futile, but it gives a very good example of anamorphic transformation.

## Protection and Prevention

There are many ways that humans may protect themselves from vampires. A Romanian superstition that is very important and even prominent in works about vampires is the use of garlic (Lecouteux 15). Some authors say that the garlic itself is what repels vampires, while others say it is simply unpleasant to their enhanced sense of smell. Another common repellent used for vampires is holy items. Examples of holy items are the cross/crucifix and holy water. These are often used to scare off the lesser vampires (weaker or newer vampires). Christian holy items are historically known to be the most common form of protection against vampires (Lecouteux 92).

Prevention techniques were possibly used as far back as the Neolithic Era. There is a type of revenant that stays in the grave and consumes the life force of its family members by chewing on the shroud or clothing that it was buried with. This revenant is known as a chewer (Lecouteux 70). The people of the Neolithic Era placed the bodies of the dead face down. This may have been a way to divert any malefic energy that the corpse might still contain (Lecouteux 93). The way that the Neolithic people buried their dead relates to the chewer because, by laying the dead on their stomach, if they should start to chew, all of their energy would flow into the ground and no living person would be drained of life (Lecouteux 93).

When burying their dead, people in medieval times would take every precaution possible if a death were suspicious. A suspect death includes the actual death of the person and how the corpse is handled until burial. Periodicals from that time to more modern times outline many ways that a death could be suspicious. These periodicals were “interpreted as heralds of the transformation of the dead individual into a vampire” (Lecouteux 89). The signs to be wary of include the shroud becoming wet with the tears or mourners, any animal crossing the body, a

window opening at the time of death (Lecouteux 89-91). To deal with these corpses, many different areas of Europe took similar precautions. In the medieval era, people would decapitate the corpse and place the head at the foot of the casket so that it could not be reached (Lecouteux 95). Romanians would place garlic in the many orifices of the body and impale the heart of the corpse with a wooden stake. Such deaths that would require the dead to be pinned down with a stake were those of the people who were dangerous in life or that of a mother who died in childbirth (Lecouteux 63).

### **Killing the vampire**

According to fiction, there are 1001 ways to kill a vampire (or so there seems). In some series, the vampires can be killed only by exposure to sunlight, decapitation, and staking. In others a good bullet through the heart will take care of the younger vampires (Hamilton). A mysterious quality attributed to vampires is their seeming immortality. It is possible to kill a vampire, but it must be done through an act of violence. When Dr. Van Helsing must kill Lucy Westenra, for example, it is not a calm act. First he impales her through the heart using a wooden stake, then he decapitates her and fills her orifices and casket with garlic. This reveals the typical Romanian way that he uses to kill Lucy and give her a “final death”. Final death happens when a vampire is fully dead. For humans who are not turned into some immortal creature or those who do not believe in multiple lives, final death is simply when the body stops functioning. A vampire is a person who has died and been resurrected as a vampire. To have a final death, it must be killed after it has become a vampire.

Some vampires avoid sunlight because it will burn their bodies until the fire kills them. The cause of this is unknown, but it is a good way to kill most vampires. As these creatures are nocturnal, a human would be most likely to encounter one at night. Thus it becomes important to



sneak up on the vampire during the day and expose it to sunlight. In some instances, it is believed that a vampire is a demon that inhabits the human body once the human soul has fled (Gellar, Brendon and Hannigan). In the *Anita Blake* series, the vampire soul actually flees the body and the body dies at sunrise. This is an opportune moment to steal into a vampire's lair to either expose it to sunlight or otherwise kill it.

Revenants are susceptible to fire. Some debate is seen between myth and literature as to how to kill a vampire using fire. Literature dictates that a character could potentially take a flamethrower and torch a vampire in that manner (Hamilton). Myth says that organs like the heart and liver must be extracted or else the remainder of the vampire's body will not be able to burn (Lecouteux 111). Cremation is one of the lesser-used ways to execute vampires, but it is fairly effective if the vampire is immobile. Immortality seems like such a wonderful thing, until it can be ended through some form of gruesome or violent death.

### **Myth, Monster, and Mayhem**

#### *Myth: Cultural Representations of the Fiend*

Vampire myths and legends come from all corners of the inhabited globe. Most of the stories that are used in western culture originate in Eastern European countries. Other myths and tales about vampires come from Asia and South America. These continents all have well known history and ancient ancestry. From this ancestry come many myths that are found today. Through myths humans can take a glance at what life was like before the Scientific Revolution, an age of reasoning and science. Myths help to keep contact with the human experience and give us examples of human behaviors.

The central point of the vampire and revenant myths is fear and superstitions that sprout from fear. Most of the vampire myths follow a formula. First, the stranger appears. Then unexplainable deaths occur or someone is attacked. Thirdly, an outstanding character or a community of people must discover the creature responsible for the deaths. Finally, the community kills the creature and celebrates the end of the terror. These myths give specific traits and names to the vampires, according to where the myth originated. Looking at specific areas of the globe is difficult due to changing geographic and political lines, so it is simplest to define these vampires according to general areas associated with continents and the countries within those borders. However, the focus will be on the most copious source of vampire knowledge, Eastern Europe.

## **Eastern Europe**

### *Romania*

Romania is considered by some to have the largest vampire population in the world. Why else would there be so many stories that come from there in regards to vampire folklore and myth? It is from this area that the knowledge of how to protect against and even kill vampires comes. A very interesting tale comes from northern Romania in regards to the exhumation of an individual that was a vampire:

This individual, according to Claude Lecouteux, had been dead for a long period of time and many members of his family were dying mysteriously. No distinction was made between the hale and the ill; the only commonality is that all the dead were from the same family. This man's tomb seemed very suspicious and so the tomb was exhumed. In the tomb the man was sitting there, healthy as can be when he was supposed to have passed years ago. His skin was ruddy and he was very healthy. The villagers pulled him from his tomb and removed his heart and liver so



that they could burn his body. Without the removal of those vital organs the body would not be able to burn and the vampire would live on. Once the vampire was burned the ashes were mixed into a drink that was given to the ill. All who drank of this were cured of their sickness.

(Lecouteux 111)

In the case of someone that was in danger of becoming a vampire, drastic measures were taken. A wooden stake would impale the heart of the corpse, the head pinned to the grave by a nail or was removed and placed at the corpse's feet, and garlic or incense was placed in all of the body's orifices (Lecouteux 15, 95). These measures would be used in any suspect death and in many cases would occur days to months afterwards. In some cases, when the death was not suspicious, strange things would start to occur and so the body would be exhumed and this process would take place. In accordance with superstition a ritual had to occur or else risk the revenants rising again.

### *Belarus, Serbia, and the Slavic People*

Belarus, Serbia and the Slavs all have myths about spirit lovers that are also vampires. Each one has different nuances, but in general they have the same theme. In Belarus the vampire appeared to a woman as a serpent spirit. This serpent is also known as a serpent-lover (Lecouteux 41). The Slavic spirit lover vampire also takes the form of the serpent. This vampire visits the wife that he had during life. A couple of identifiable features of this vampire are that on the feet of this vampire in humanoid form were wooden shoes and that as a serpent he can fly (Lecouteux 40). The Serbian spirit lover also visited his wife. He actually would lie with his wife until she begot a child. However, this child would be born without bones and would eventually die (Lecouteux 40).

### *Poland*

The Polish believe in a seductive vampire similar to that of the Belarusians, Serbians, and the Slavs. This vampire is known as the *lataweic*. A specific trait of this vampire is that he has the ability to seduce women with his gaze. This gaze is also very deadly. All women who are pierced by this gaze soon languish and die (Lecouteux 41). The *lataweic* does not leave any sign that he has been in the vicinity except for the women who die after meeting his glance.

The common belief that a vampire was responsible for sudden widespread death is prevalent concerning another type of revenant. The *strzygi* was thought to climb a church steeple. When that happened people of the same age as the *strzygi* within a certain area would perish (Lecouteux 51). A common sign that a vampire is responsible for the deaths is found in the victims' symptoms. Languor would turn to withering away until death would overcome the victim. Just as doctors used to call at the houses of the sick in order to help them, vampirologists would visit victims and listen to their symptoms. After hearing what the victim has to say, he will make a deduction as to whether or not the reason for the illness is a vampire. A vampirologist is someone who has studied the mythology of vampires and has been trained to recognize the symptoms of a vampire attack and the signs that a vampire is affecting an area.

### *Bulgaria*

A common practice in Bulgaria was to lay the dead on a table in order to prepare the body for burial. If a chicken or a cat were to cross under the body, the chances are that the body would rise again as a vampire. The body would need to be bathed in the "oil of extreme unction" (Lecouteux 51) in order to prevent the transformation. An interesting superstition that goes hand in hand with this is that when a cat or other household animal crosses the dead body of its owner it is because it is glad to have run of the household (Lecouteux 51). Often cats would be thrown

out of the house before this could happen, but it was not a secret that there was not any love lost between a cat and its owner.

Motifs in myths are often expressed as metaphors. In the Bulgarian belief there was a spirit lover that was similar to that of the Belarusians, Serbians, and Slavs, which took the form of a snake. When a woman takes this snake to her bed she runs the risk of being marked for death. The Bulgarians have a metaphor that indicates that if a young girl marries a snake, it means that she has died (Lecouteux 41).

### *Germany*

Of the many types of vampires, passive vampires seemed to be the ones to plague Germany. Passive vampires do not attack humans directly, but rather stay in their coffins and absorb the life energy of their families until the family members catch on and kill the vampire or all perish. The chewer is one such vampire. When placed in a coffin, a body must either be placed in a certain position or care must be taken that nothing is in or near the mouth.

Archeologists can trace burial rituals back to the Neolithic era. It is believed that the Neolithic people placed their dead face down so that when the malefic energy of the corpse escaped, it would be absorbed into the ground rather than be expelled into the world (Lecouteux 91). In the case of a chewer it would eat dirt (literally) rather than chew on its shroud. The *nachzehrer* is the name of the German chewer and *nachzehrer* is translated as “one who causes death by devouring someone” (Lecouteux 70). This translation is unusual due to the fact that chewers strictly devour the life force of an individual.

The ritual of readying the body for burial is an old tradition and certain measures were taken to prevent a corpse from becoming a chewer. Many precautions were taken in regards to a

corpse's mouth. In some regions of the country the mouth was sewn closed so that no movement could occur. Other regions would cover the mouth with wood or place dirt inside of the mouth (Lecouteux 90). In the case of the shroud and burial clothes, they would also be kept well away from the mouth so they wouldn't be chewed on. The vampire would chew on these until those who it was close to in life perish (Lecouteux 71).

### *Monster: the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature of the Vampire Craze*

*The Vampyre*, *Carmilla*, and *Dracula* are three prominent and influential stories in the developing popularity of gothic literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Together these pieces of literature are the most comprehensive documents that are comprised of the collective research on what a vampire is in a culture, *Dracula* being the most collective model for 19<sup>th</sup> century literature. Vampires were used in these stories as a horror element. Gothic-horror novels began their turn in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **John Polidori's *The Vampyre***

Dr. John Polidori met with friends who were also writers, Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*) and Lord Byron, and exchanged many ghost stories with them. At one gathering, many different ideas of horror figures were put forth, but it was Polidori that put forth a tale that has been claimed as the novella that sparked the vampire craze: *The Vampyre* (Jenkins 69). The tale that he weaves is A dark tale of seduction and death, yet the writing style implies so much of what happens that it leaves audiences gasping for more.

In the style of most horrific tales, a stranger enters into a community. This stranger is Lord Ruthven, a cold and impressive figure. His face and form are incredibly ugly, but his mannerisms and personality are quite charming. A young gentleman and his sister also come into

the community and the young man catches the attention of Lord Ruthven. The young man's name is Aubrey; he is a romantic and believes that whatever poets wrote were the facts of life (Polidori 8). Aubrey catches the attention of Lord Ruthven and they become good friends and travel companions.

The duo head to explore Europe and the first stop is Rome. After arriving, Ruthven abandons Aubrey to court women and "[Aubrey's] guardians insisted upon his immediately leaving his friend, and urged, that his character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society" (Polidori 10). Aubrey believes his guardians and wishes to leave his companion, but finds himself traveling to Greece with the man. It is there that a new companion, Ianthe, revealed the monstrosity of the vampire to him: "She detailed to him the traditional appearance of these monsters, and his horror was increased, by hearing a pretty accurate description of Lord Ruthven...he wondered at the many coincidences which had all tended to excite a belief in the supernatural power of Lord Ruthven" (Polidori 13). Even after having heard from multiple accounts as to the qualities of the vampire, Aubrey still stays with Ruthven. He ventures into a well-known living space for vampires and is attacked by one. It is then that he truly realizes his danger.

He begs Lord Ruthven to continue traveling, despite many rumors of robbers. Robbers kidnap them and Lord Ruthven passes away. After his passing, the robbers set Aubrey and Ruthven's guards free. Ruthven's guards had been instructed to lay him where he could be exposed to the moon's rays. When Aubrey goes to check on Lord Ruthven's body, he finds that it has disappeared! Aubrey believes his body to have been taken for money by the robbers and he returns home to his sister. Once home, he falls into solitude – many believe him to be mad. But

lo! There he is, “Lord Ruthven again before him... He roused himself, he could not believe it possible – the dead rise again!” (Polidori 20).

The target of Lord Ruthven’s affections is Aubrey’s own sister. Try as he may he is unable to persuade his sister against allowing Ruthven to court her. Aubrey had been deemed mad by society and so his warnings were not taken seriously. With Aubrey’s death approaching after Ruthven has attacked him, Lord Ruthven obtains permission to rush his and Miss Aubrey’s wedding. After they have left for their honeymoon, Aubrey sends their guardians after his sister and Ruthven. But they were too late, “Aubrey’s own sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!” (Polidori 24).

That is the end of the tale. Aubrey dies before he has knowledge of his sister being feasted on by Lord Ruthven, but in the end the truth is revealed to the community. Ruthven’s character is said to be the starting image of the vampire. He is cold and calculating, seductive in manner and voice, but not in looks. Indeed, he was terribly pale and his eyes held a disconcerting gaze.

Polidori’s novella was published in 1819 and created a framework from which other authors built upon the image of the vampire and placed specific characteristics with it. For example, a prominent preternatural ability that is attributed to vampires is their superhuman strength. Polidori’s vampire is actually a representation of a vampire group called the “famished” (Lecouteux 60). Dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, this vampire has plagued people and is said to devour the dead. The famished always leaves a mark on its victims; a mark could be a blue pinpoint or actually teeth marks. The use of the famished vampire in the story actually lends creditability to the Greek community that Aubrey visits which has extensive knowledge of the vampire. It provides evidence to a long tradition of vampires in human culture.

### **Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla***

Published in 1872, *Carmilla* is long removed from Polidori's tale, but it has a similar sense of mystery and suspense. Throughout the telling, Sheridan le Fanu hints at Carmilla's vampire nature, but it is not until the end that the reader discovers she really is a vampire. Le Fanu also brings into play females as vampires, something that had not been seen before. Many of the myths that are accessible today describe men as the forerunners of those that transform into vampires. These male vampires are often seductive and lure a female into having sexual relations with them. The figure of the female vampire is described as similar and different from males.

Carmilla is the vampire in le Fanu's tale and she is around 200 years old. She prefers the company of her own sex and likes to prey on them. At the beginning of the tale, Carmilla is left with the narrator, Laura, and her father due to her "poor health" as her "mother" continues on their journey. While Carmilla is staying with Laura and her father, women in the country start languishing away and dying mysteriously. This is of major concern for the community.

As the days go by, Laura learns of Carmilla's strange tendencies to never eat and to keep very strange waking hours. She rises only in the afternoons to spend time with her hosts. Carmilla also turns her nose up at the funeral songs that are played whenever the townspeople pass by to bury someone, due to her dislike of anything very religious. Eventually, Laura starts to have strange dreams in which she is visited by a strange and foreboding presence. She falls ill and is examined by a doctor who is very frightened by her symptoms.

It is at this time that an old family friend arrives at Laura's home. He relays an account of how his daughter passed away after being drained of life by a woman named Millarca, whom he had taken into his home under circumstances that were strangely similar to those of Carmilla's. It



is then that the family (sans Carmilla) decides to investigate the ruins of an old castle that are nearby the household. There they hear of the family who once lived in the castle being slaughtered by a monstrous creature and that the family was entombed on the property. At this time Carmilla disappears and it is confirmed that she is the suspicious Millarca who was born as Mircalla, Countess of Karnstein.

The group decides to exhume Carmilla at the site where Mircalla is entombed and when the grave is opened, they find Carmilla in her coffin:

The features, though a hundred and fifty years had passed since her funeral, were tinted with the warmth of life. Her eyes were open; no cadaverous smell exhaled from the coffin. Two medical men, one officially present, the other on the part of the promoter of the inquiry attested the marvelous fact, that there was a faint, but appreciable respiration, and a corresponding action of the heart. The limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic; and the leaden coffin floated with blood, in which to a depth of seven inches, the body lay immersed. (le Fanu 134)

After the discovery of her body, the ritual used by Romanians in the case of a suspicious death was carried out. Her heart is staked, her head lopped off, and she is dismembered completely and destroyed.

*Carmilla* presents a new way of looking at vampires. Carmilla was *attractive* and not just in a standard runway model way. Try thinking more of Aphrodite and we will be a bit closer to how she looked. In a few cases beauty like Carmilla's is linked to lust. The famished are thought to be linked to Greek mythology. The Greeks have a myth about a creature called the "empusa". These creatures are thought of as lamias and ghouls who are capable of falling in love and are devoted to "the delights of Aphrodite" (Lecouteux 61). They are especially attracted to human



flesh and actually devour human blood. Additionally, whenever female vampires are described, the words chosen are usually *seductive* and *voluptuous* (Lecouteux 12).

Laura was also left with a mark on her body. This is a hallmark of the famished. It is thought that the famished are equated with young vampires who do not yet know how to conceal their activities (Lecouteux 60). This mark is also a way of telling if someone who has been attacked by a vampire will also turn into one. *Carmilla* introduces the idea of metamorphosing into a shape other than that of a humanoid figure. Carmilla can shift her form from a humanoid figure into a dark shadowy figure which allows her to slip through small cracks to enter or leave rooms. She actually locks the doors and windows of the room she stays in at Laura's house and so it would be necessary for her to be able to slip through cracks to escape back to her grave.

The theme of the hidden lair of the vampire was introduced in this story. Of course, the burial site of Mircalla was known, but the resting place of Carmilla was an unknown fact. It was not until the connection was made that Carmilla (Mircalla, Mirllaca) was unable to change her name to anything that did not have the same letters as her original name was made. Another characteristic that *Carmilla* portrays is when a rash of people fall ill and die. These people experienced a great languor until they wasted away and died (Lecouteux 52).

### **Bram Stoker's *Dracula***

*The vampire live on, and cannot die by the mere passing of time, he can flourish when that he can fatten on the blood of the living. Even more, we have seen amongst us that he can grow younger, that his vital faculties grow strenuous, and seem as though they refresh themselves when his special pabulum is plenty. But he cannot flourish without this diet, he eat not as others. Even friend Jonathon, who lived with him for weeks, did never see him eat, never! He throws no shadow,*

*he make in the mirror no reflect, as again Jonathan observe. He has the strength of many of his hand, witness again Jonathan when he shut the door against the wolves, and when he help him form the diligence too. He can transform himself to wolf, as we gather from the ship arrival in Whitby, when he tear open the dog, he can be as bat.... He can come in mist which he create... the distance he can make the mist is limited and it can only be around himself. He come on moonlight rays as elemental dust, as again Jonathan saw those sisters in the castle of Dracula. He become so small we ourselves saw Miss Lucy, ere she was at peace, slip through a hairbreadth space at the tomb door. He can, when once he find his way, come out from anything or into anything, no matter how close it be bound or even fused up with fire, solder you call it. He can see in the dark, no small power this, in a world which is one half shut from the light. Ah, but hear me through. He can do all of these things, yet he is not free. Nay, he is even more prisoner than the slave of the galley, than the madman in his cell. He cannot go where he lists, he is not of nature has yet to obey some of nature's laws, why we know not. He may not enter anywhere at the first, unless there be some one of the household who bid him to come, though afterwards he can come as he please. His power ceases, as does that of all evil things, at the coming of the day. Only at certain times can he have limited freedom. If he be not at the place whither he is bound, he can only change himself at noon or at exact sunrise or sunset. These things we are told, and in this record of ours we have proof by inference. Thus, whereas he can do as he will within his limit, when he have his earth-home, his coffin-home, his hell-home, the place unhallowed, as we saw when he went to the grave of*

*suicide at Whitby, still at other time he can only change when the time come. It is said, too, that he can only pass running water at the slack or the flood of the tide. Then there are things which so afflict him that he has no power, as the garlic that we know of, and as for things sacred as this symbol, my crucifix, that was amongst us even now when we resolve, to them he is nothing, but in their presence he take his place far off and silent with respect. There are other, too, which I shall tell you of, lest seeking we may need them. The branch of wild rose on his coffin keep him that he move not from it, a sacred bullet fired into the coffin kill him so that he may be true dead, and as for the stake through him, we know already of its peace, or the cutoff head that giveth rest. We have seen it with our own eyes. (Stoker 230-232)*

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is the single most influential and comprehensive piece of literature in regards to vampire knowledge. The novel is an epistolary novel, containing letters, journal entries, and telegrams from multiple characters. Due to the shifting points of view the audience sees similar but differing accounts of the events that occur. The above quote is from a meeting of the characters in which Dr. Abraham Van Helsing, considered the first vampire slayer by many, describes the different traits of vampires. This image of the vampire is what has shaped the modern idea of what a vampire is.

The novel opens with a young lawyer traveling to Castle Dracula to settle a real estate transaction. There he meets Count Dracula, the client, and he discovers that his host is not all that he seems. Jonathan Harker observes many strange things about the man. His strength is greater than that of any man, and he is able to scale sheer cliff faces. He himself is repulsive but his mannerisms are charming. Harker becomes Dracula's prisoner and in an attempt to find a way

out of the castle, he comes across Dracula in his burial site. With the realization that his captor is a monster, Harker flees the castle.

Meanwhile, Mina Murray – soon to be Mina Harker – speaks with her friend Lucy Westenra about her suitors. All three men become important figures in the story, but Lucy chooses to marry a man by the name of Arthur Holmwood. When Mina visits Lucy at the British resort town, Whitby, strange occurrences begin to happen. A ship goes ashore, its only cargo a set of boxes filled with dirt and the entire crew missing. The only living thing is a vicious dog that runs from the ship.

Soon after, Lucy falls into languor. She has two pinpricks at her throat, which no one can explain. It is then that Dr. Seward sends for his friend Dr. Van Helsing. He examines Lucy and knows exactly what is the source of her illness: a vampire! He immediately spreads cloves of garlic around her room and bids her to wear a necklace of garlic flowers. This will ward off the fiend. This does her little good because her mother removes the garlic and Lucy continues to get worse. Dr. Seward and Dr. Van Helsing begin to give Lucy blood transfusions in the hope of saving her. But it is of no use; Lucy perishes.

After her death, news of a Bloofer lady spreads all across the London papers (Stoker 172). Lucy has come back from the dead! She is now a vampire and the group knows what must happen. They must give Lucy her final death. Dr. Van Helsing leads the other men into her tomb to find her transformed. She is able to slip through the tiniest cracks and that is how she has escaped her resting place. Her ex-fiancé volunteers to stake her through her heart while she sleeps. Then the other men decapitate her and stuff her mouth with garlic. After the deed is done, they swear that Dracula himself is next.

Jonathan returns to England with his new wife, Mina, by his side. They are swiftly brought up to date on the situation. They all begin to track down the boxes of dirt that have come from Castle Dracula. It is then that Mina begins to fall ill, much the same as Lucy had. Then the race is on to save her! Due to the group's having destroyed the boxes, the count is forced to return to his castle. It is there that the group finds him and destroys him; "It was like a miracle, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight" (Stoker 364).

It is in *Dracula* that Stoker introduces the notion of garlic being a deterrent to vampires, having borrowed the idea from Romanian vampire mythology (Lecouteux 15). In fact, garlic has been used as a repellant against evil spells and beings since the Middle Ages. In many myths any flower with a strong odor could be a repellant for demons (Lecouteux 15). Another important element that he emphasizes is was the need for Dracula to have his grave soil. It is only when the group in *Dracula* begins to destroy the dirt by sterilization, that Dracula is forced to return to his home.

Interestingly enough, there is a time in *Dracula* when the count appears in the sunlight. This is mysterious because audiences everywhere know that vampires do not do well in the sunlight unless they are "day walkers", which is a type of vampire that can walk in the sunlight. When Harker sees the count on Hyde Park Corner in the middle of the day he is surprised, the count appeared to be younger. He was shocked because people's appearances just did not change. Dr. Van Helsing explains to the group that it is his glutting his thirst for human blood that has caused this change.

Bram Stoker also introduced animal metamorphosing in vampire literature. He did not create the idea, but took inspiration from mythology (Lecouteux 34). In the novel, the fiend



transforms into multiple animals. He is the wolf/dog that jumps off the ship and he also can transform into a bat.

The single, most important aspect of this novel is that it sets the stage for the modern vampire. Stoker paints a detailed portrait of the characteristics of vampires, especially the powers and certain characteristics that set this monster apart from all others. It is from here that film and the evolution of the vampire as a literary character began. Soon after *Dracula* was published, many authors published stories that seemed to mimic Stoker's novel. All these imitators followed a similar storyline with similar characters. Stoker perhaps had his eye on a stage adaptation of his novel, as he was a member of the theatre community. However, he died prior to writing a stage adaptation, and he instead made the largest contribution to the subgenre of vampire literature.

*Mayhem: The Modern Vampire in Literature and film*

### **Modern Literature**

As far as modern literature goes, sagas are the name of the game. There are very few stand-alone novels that have an impact on today's pop culture. Take a look at publishing: Anne Rice, Charlaine Harris, Laurell K. Hamilton, Stephanie Meyer – all have multi-novel sagas that build on one another. A strength of each of these tales is how different they are. Certainly, there is the underlying theme of vampires and the many powers that they have, but, in general, the tales are vastly different.

In the last several decades, vampire literature has turned away from being dark and horrifying to being a very sexualized creature. It is thanks to the changes made to Bram Stoker's original tale, *Dracula*, that there is a platform for such a change. Divergences have also been made in the powers attributed to vampires. More preternatural powers have been associated with

the fiend: more than levitation and strange mists, that is. Laurell K. Hamilton's *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series creates a whole world of vampire villains with all sorts of new and dangerous abilities.

*Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter*

The world of Laurell K. Hamilton's twenty-one book series is a vast departure from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. No longer worried about the old world, the series is set in modern day Saint Louis. Anita Blake is a vampire executioner. She has the most legal vampire kills on record. Anita also is a police consultant for a new preternatural squad lovingly called R-P-I-T (pronounced rip-it). If that seems crazy, her job seems more so. Anita raises the dead for a living. She has supernatural powers that allow her to be an animator. Later it is discovered that her powers are so great that she is considered to be a necromancer. Usually the term is associated with evil, but Anita is anything but evil. This power is turned into the business of raising the dead for the living to gain closure for their passing (Hamilton).

From the very first book in the series, Anita has admirers – the most important is a 200 plus year-old vampire by the name of Jean-Claude. Jean-Claude is an important member of the Saint Louis vampire community. Early on in the series he becomes the “master of the city” (aka the leader of the vampire population, like a mob boss). It is obvious that Jean-Claude holds affection for Anita, but she does not like vampires. In fact, she kills them for the government.

Vampires are citizens in this series; they have rights afforded to them by the government. This is a recent change in the history of the story line, but it creates changes in what Anita is allowed to do. She has the highest execution count legally, but her illegal count from confrontations with corrupt vampires is even higher. Vampires are fearful of her and rightfully so. But not Jean-Claude; he only holds her in the highest regard, his *ma petite*.

Anita eventually succumbs to the charms of men and experiences quite the supernatural romance. The first man she dates is a middle school science teacher, Richard Zeeman. He happens to be a werewolf. When he becomes alpha (leader) of the Saint Louis werewolf clan, he dislikes his animal nature. Anita is then embroiled in a vicious love triangle with him and Jean-Claude, because if she can date one monster, she can date another.

All manners of bad things occur in the series, including challenges and new abilities being associated with vampires (though not all new abilities are bad). An important distinction in the abilities attributed to the vampires in this series is that they follow vampire bloodlines. So, similarly to human genetics, if the head of the vampire line has an ability, he or she will pass the full ability or part of the ability to any vampire that he or she creates.

A powerful and influential vampire in the series is Belle Morte (French for beautiful death). The power attributed to her line is what is called the ardeur (Hamilton). Only Belle Morte, Jean-Claude, and Anita experience the full effect of the ability, but others are known to have side abilities. These side abilities differ because while based on the original power, they emanate in a different way. For example, one vampire in the series is a child of Belle Morte and his bite has the ability to bring his victim to the highest level of pleasure. The ardeur is a power that pulls those under its power and incites them with the intense need to have sexual intercourse. This power is definitely seen as aligning with the idea of incubi and succubi (sex demons) and, in the series, these are attributed to the people that have this power.

Anita is a human, but she is afflicted with the ardeur due to her connection to Jean-Claude as his human servant. A human servant is bound to a master vampire by magical bonds called marks. There are four marks that can be made and these will make the human have the same lifespan of the vampire. A benefit or a snag in this symbiosis is that a master vampire's



powers can be passed on to his or her human servant. This is how Anita obtains this power. She is forced to feed the power by having sexual intercourse multiple times a day and is really quite resentful about it.

Another ability seen in *Bloody Bones* is the ability for a vampire to allow his or her body to rot. This disgusting ability is used as a terror agent in the book against one of Anita's cohorts. This power is said to come from Morte D'Amour (the lover of death), another vampire. Others in his bloodline are able to use a power called corruption, which involves a vampire of the bloodline biting someone and forcing his or her body to rot.

Some vampires also have powers that are more individual than family traits. Vampires who have their own powers are called master vampires. Master vampires are those vampires who attain a high power status and develop a preternatural power. Some of these powers include the ability to call animals, the ability to rise while the sun is up, triumvirates (a power structure between a vampire human servant and animal servant), pyrokinesis, and telekinesis (Hamilton).

Hamilton masterfully develops the world of this series; she clearly has done her research. The animal groups of the city (shape shifters of different animal types) all have specific terminology associated with hierarchy. The werewolf clan has hierarchy names that are deeply rooted in Norse mythology. Positions like fenrir, freyja, and skoll are all important positions in the society. The vampire hierarchy is also well defined. The master of the city is a vampire who is powerful enough to reign over a geographic region. Jean-Claude, for example, is the master of the city of Saint Louis and he is made even more powerful with Anita by his side. In turn, masters of the city must report to the Vampire Council. This council is based in Europe and holds vast powers. Many *sourdre de sangs* (those vampires who are the patriarch or matriarch of their own blood lines) are on this council and thus the council is very powerful

Though this world is very different from *Dracula's*, it does have similarities. Most of those similarities are found in the basic powers that vampires have. Vampires of both worlds have the superhuman strength, speed and agility, and senses. They are both almost immortal. Anita uses multiple methods to kill vampires, but staking and beheading will definitely kill any being. In both worlds, vampires are repelled by holy items like the cross or holy water. In the Anita Blake world, however, the usefulness of the cross depends on the level of faith that a person has. For example, in Anita's hand, a cross glows very brightly and would burn the skin of a vampire. In the hands of atheists, it would not glow or protect them from vampires. In Stoker's world, anyone can hold the cross. It is assumed that the people are believers. Another commonality is the aversion to sunlight. Some master vampires do obtain the ability to be awake during daytime hours, but they still shun sunlight.

It is undeniable that Laurell K. Hamilton's world is a detailed and difficult world. This book series has reached a staggering 21 full-length novels and has a very large fan base. Multiple versions of her stories have been made, including a graphic novel. This series provides an excellent foil to the 19<sup>th</sup> century tales that were previously discussed. There are many salacious characters and even more violence. The novels also take the opportunity to explore other preternatural creatures like lycanthropes and zombies. Hamilton uses this opportunity to take the familiar and add new elements to the scenery. In the case of this novel series, Hamilton uses the scenery of Saint Louis, Missouri and fits the fantastic world of vampires and other preternatural creatures into a very real setting. Natives of Saint Louis will recognize the areas and street names that Hamilton uses, which creates a unique reading experience.

*Interview with the Vampire*

Anne Rice is another writer who has created an intricate world in which the real and the preternatural reside. *Interview with the Vampire* is the first in the ten book series. This novel is different from others within the realm of vampire literature because it is told from the perspective of a vampire, whereas, most tales are told from the point of view of humans who are struggling against the power of vampires.

The story unfolds as a vampire named Louis begins to tell his life story to a boy (in the film he is called Daniel Molloy). Louis first explains that he was born on a plantation near New Orleans more than 200 years ago. He explains how he became acquainted with Lestat, a vampire who desires both Louis' company and his money. It is Lestat who changes Louis into a vampire. As he is taught the ways of the vampire, Louis finds it difficult to shed the mold of the moral human, where killing is an unforgivable sin. Eventually the slaves on the plantations begin to notice the mysterious deaths around them and it forces Lestat and Louis to flee.

They choose to flee to New Orleans, which is the midst of an epidemic. Humans are dying of a plague, which makes it very easy for the vampires to hide. One night, Louis comes across a little girl and feeds on her until she is almost dead. Lestat later changes her and she becomes Louis's companion. After she is changed, she tells the two older vampires that her name is Claudia. While Lestat is teaching Claudia all the ways of the vampire, Louis is nurturing her mind. He teaches her of the arts, like music and literature, and educates her the way the aristocracy would teach their children. Claudia grows to despise Lestat for creating her and she devises a plan to get rid of him. She eventually poisons him and drains him of his blood. She and Louis deposit his body in the swamps and plan to leave New Orleans. On the night that they

were set to leave, however, Lestat returns and attacks them. It is only when Louis sets fire to the apartment that they are able to escape to their ship, hoping that Lestat will die in the fire.

Louis continues his story by describing his and Claudia's travels in Europe. While in the midst of the countryside, they come to an inn. It is there that they hear from humans about vampires. There is an English woman who was drained dry of blood and the villagers wish to ensure that she does not rise as a vampire. The woman's husband explains that earlier that day they had seen the villagers dig up a woman's grave to prevent her from rising:

"I'll tell you. They took a stake, a wooden stake with a hammer and he put it right through her breast. I didn't believe it! And then with one great blow he drove it right into her. I tell you, I couldn't have moved even if I'd wanted to; I was rooted there. And then that fellow, that vastly fellow, he reached up for his shovel and with both his arms he drove it sharp, right into the dead woman's throat. Then was off like that." (Rice 179)

He continues, explaining that the villagers want to do that to his wife. He thinks that he is surrounded by mad people. It is then that Louis and Claudia decide to leave the town in search of the vampire responsible for these deaths (and because of the imminent threat of being killed themselves). They do find vampires in the countryside, but they seem to be mindless creatures.

After some time, the two travel to Paris, where they meet troubadours who are vampires, pretending to be human, pretending to be vampires. Armand is one of the vampires in the group. He and Louis become friends over time. Claudia despises these troubadour vampires, believing that they are below her. She convinces Louis to change another girl into a vampire so that she may have a new companion. They all live together for a time before Lestat appears once more. Lestat captures them and places Louis in a coffin so that he can starve to death, and he leaves Claudia and her companion out in the sun. Armand rescues Louis, but Claudia and her

companion perish. Devastated by these deaths, Louis and Armand leave Paris and travel across Europe. When Louis becomes weary of traveling he dissolves his friendship with Armand and returns to New Orleans.

Louis lives by himself, never creating another companion for himself. He is weary of his second life. He ends his tale by describing his last encounter with Lestat in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The boy, Daniel, is fascinated by the tale and begs that Louis make him into a vampire. Angry that the boy missed the point of his tale, which was that being a vampire is not as glorious as it seems to be, he shoves the boy and vanishes from the room.

This story is really amazing due to Anne Rice's ability to mix the real with the fantastic. Told from the point of view of a vampire, it is unique in that the audience learns about what it is like to be a vampire. A poignant part of the story is when Louis describes what he felt and experienced during his change. He says:

... He sank his teeth into my neck.... I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion.... The result was that within minutes I was weak with paralysis. Panic-stricken, I discovered I could not even will myself to speak. Lestat still held me, of course, and his arm was like the weight of an iron bar. I felt his teeth withdraw with such a keenness that the two puncture wounds seemed enormous, lined with pain. And now he bent over my helpless head and, taking his right hand off me, bit his own wrist.... He pressed his bleeding wrist to my mouth and said firmly, a little impatiently, 'Louis, drink.' And I did.... I saw nothing but that light then as I drew that blood. And then this next thing, this next thing was ... sound. A dull roar at first and then a pounding like a

drum, growing louder and louder... I checked myself because I realized that the drum was my heart... (Rice 19-20)

The powerful imagery in this passage is one reason why this scene is poignant. Louis is shedding his human life for a life of vampire, a moment that he has conflicting emotions about.

Another point that Rice makes is the physical beauty of the vampire. The 19<sup>th</sup> century literature perpetuated the belief that vampires were hideous, monstrous creatures. Their ugliness was matched only by their black souls. Rice's vampires, however, were beautiful: "The vampire was utterly white and smooth, as if he were sculpted from bleached bone, and his face was as inanimate as a statue, except for two brilliantly green eyes that looked down at the boy intently like flames in the skull" (Rice 4).

The vampires in Anne Rice's novel do not possess any special powers like the vampires in Hamilton's. Instead they are more similar to Stoker's vampires. As important as it is that vampires travel with coffins, it is wholly unnecessary for Rice's vampires to transport dirt from their resting place, a definite bonus to these vampires. Similarities exist in the need to stay out of the sun, immortality, superhuman strength and speed, and the ability to stay healthy and heal quickly.

This novel and the others in the series have done very well and there is a reason for that. Besides entertaining readers, they provide a criticism of society. The world of Lestat, Louis, Claudia, and Armand is one of human vices like jealousy, lust, anger, and pettiness. The world of reality is not perfect and neither is Rice's world. This is a reason why readers keep coming back for more. Another reason why readers are drawn to Rice's series is the high quality of her writing. Her writing provides vivid imagery of Louis's world and draws readers to return to his world.



*Twilight or Where Stephanie Meyer Went Wrong*

The story begins as many romances do. A boy and a girl meet, fall in love, and get married. However, this story is a little different. There are vampires and werewolves that fight amongst themselves and strive to keep their lives secret. However, added aspects of the story, like the actions of the main characters, detract from the romantic aspect of the story.

So Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight Series* is not one of the classic stories, but it does have a large impact in today's popular culture. The first book of the series was published in 2005 and within a couple of years it had a large following. This prompted Meyer to write the next three books. The protagonist, Bella Swan, is a likable character, but her life is entirely dysfunctional. Her parents are divorced and she is more of an adult than either of them. She is more of a mother figure than her own mother is. When Bella is a junior in high school, she decides to live with her father.

Upon reaching the ever-damp town of Forks, Washington, she is intrigued by a gorgeous boy and his strange family. When it turns out that they are vampires, she does the sensible thing and starts a relationship with Edward Cullen. After a rough start to their relationship (i.e. Bella almost being killed by a rogue vampire), Edward leaves Bella because he believes that it is too dangerous for her to be with him.

When he leaves, Bella falls into a massive depression and begins hallucinating. She believes that she is hearing Edwards's voice, which sounds very disapproving of the way that she is letting herself waste away. So Bella decides to be rational again and does some very crazy things to draw Edward's attention, like jumping off of a cliff. It is only when Bella learns that Edward plans to expose himself and allow himself to be executed for revealing the secret of the vampire that she snaps out of her depression and goes to Italy to save him. It is there that she



meets the Volturi, the rulers of the vampire world and enforcers of the laws of the vampires. They decree that since Bella knows about vampires she must become one within a set amount of time (shortly after her high school graduation) or else they will come and change her for the Cullens.

Bella and Edward become engaged. They get married shortly after she graduates and go off on their honeymoon. While there Bella becomes pregnant. This is stunning to everyone because they did know that vampires could sire children from humans. The family wants for her to abort the child, but she refuses, risking her life. As the pregnancy goes on she becomes increasingly more ill, and only blood will keep the fetus from totally destroying her.

When it comes time for her to give birth, the baby actually kills Bella, but Edward saves her by plunging a syringe full of his venom straight into her heart (Freudians have fun with that one). This turns her into a vampire and she is able to see her daughter grow up. In the end, there is a lot of miscommunication with the Volturi and they believe that Bella and Edward's daughter is a child turned vampire. This is against all of the laws of vampires and they come to eradicate all of the Cullens and any vampire who stands with them. Due to the Cullens' gathering all of their friends as witnesses that Bella and Edward's child was not a human turned into a vampire, the Volturi accept the child and return to Italy. The rest of the vampires all live in peace and the secret of the vampires' existence remains intact. (Meyer)

Disregarding the storyline of the series, Stephanie Meyer has made errors in regards to vampires that makes any vampire "guru" cringe. She allows her vampires to be attractive, and that falls in line with the views of other modern writers, and some of her other facts are similar to those of the traditional vampires (i.e. superhuman strength, speed, senses, need for blood) but others differ from the norm. Take, for example, the reason why vampires are not allowed in the

sun. Vampire skin *sparkles* and so they cannot be in the sun without revealing to others that they are different. This is very strange departure from previous vampire lore where vampires burn when exposed to sunlight. There are jokes running around blogs that the most frightening vampire of all is the one that sparkles. Meyer's vampires also do not sleep. This is unusual because most vampires must find themselves a resting spot away from the rays of the sun. Of course, Meyer is allowed to create her own image of vampires, but at times her image seems to be humorous rather than the terrifying image created by other authors.

Perhaps there really is not much that Stephanie Meyer did wrong, but her overall writing style is distracting. For example, many of her word choices are not as mature as many of her peers. A nod is given to her for the use of the supernatural powers of telepathy, seeing visions, and many others. One of the reasons that Edward allows himself to be close to Bella is that he cannot hear her thoughts. This intrigues him and he needs to learn more about her. When she is turned into a vampire, the block in her mind actually manifests itself as the ability to make metaphysical shields.

Meyer also uses the shape shifting form of the werewolf. Her wolves are members of the Quileute tribe who have a long-standing history with vampires. The presence of the vampires is causing the young boys and a girl in the tribe to shift into wolves. These wolves are an important facet of the story, as they become allies with the vampires against the Volturi after one of them imprints on Edward and Bella's rapidly growing child. These werewolves are not bound to the cycles of the moon, but are rather able to shift into the form of a horse-sized wolf at will. Though the wolves and vampires become allies, it does not mean that they are exactly friendly to each other.

The popularity of the series is undeniable. Young and impressionable girls and women everywhere are drawn to Edward's old world charm and brooding. When truly examining the series, Meyer's poor writing becomes evident and the story starts unraveling. This book series has influenced many a female to want a man to be "like Edward". The result of the influence of this series is stomach churning. The book is disturbing because Edward's behavior in the series comes across like that of a stalker. He sneaks into Bella's room to watch her sleep, he follows her around with the intent of learning more about her, and eventually Bella falls in love with him. Another reason why it is disturbing is because Bella is not a healthy role model for females. The absolute dependency on Edward that she has gives the impression that her behavior is rational and healthy behavior.

### *Pop Culture*

One of the benefits of today's society is the role of film and media. These visual representations of stories are an amazing accomplishment and they allow for people all over to be exposed to art in the form of film. If someone were to Google the term "vampire films" he or she would turn up over 22 million results. The reality of this number is that many of these are lists and blog posts about movies. In truth, there have been several hundred vampire films released since the dawning of cinema.

Television is an art form that is similar to cinema, but is different due to the use of episodes and seasons for telling stories. In the last couple decades, two really good vampire dramas were released to the public. The first was *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the other was *True Blood*. These two shows offer different worlds in which the vampire is a major character. The importance of the vampires is different in each show, but they hold the focus either way.

Pop culture is the result of everything that people are exposed to today, all of the different forms of media winding down to us through our senses. A disturbing part of pop culture happens when people take an unpleasant behavior, like drinking blood, and make it part of their culture. There are many different groups of people who believe in and even practice vampirism in a macabre spectacle. Disturbing as it is, it is an acceptable lifestyle for some.

### **Movies**

*Dracula*, as we know from Mark Jenkins, was originally made into a stage production that debuted in London's West End in 1924. After the play crossed the pond its popularity increased. The increase in popularity was due mostly to the original image of Dracula, Béla Lugosi. Lugosi played Dracula on the stage in New York and captured the eyes of filmmakers. These filmmakers decided to turn this stage adaptation in to a film. The 1927 film adaptation of *Dracula* was a success in America. When later Universal Studios bought the right to the film, they cast Lugosi as the count. His image was the first that people associated with vampires and thus he became the image that comes to mind when someone hears the word "vampire". The movie is old-fashioned, even for its 1931 release date, but because of this it is haunting and the staging is very effective. Since then, many actors have contributed to the idea of the vampire, eventually adding the fangs to the image (53).

Many films that include vampires are either horror stories or action-thrillers. The film *Underworld* (2003) takes vampires and creates a frightening image of vampires in modern society with today's weapons. The idea is that there are elder vampires that cycle through waking cycles to make sure that the vampires in society are following their instructions and continuing the fight against the werewolves. There is a medical student who is taken and is changed into a werewolf, but not before he falls in love with the Daughter of one of the elders. At the end of the

film they rescue each other and must run from both vampires and wolves (Grevioux, Wiseman and McBride). The action-thriller aspect of this movie is a gripping element. Viewers do not know what to expect next. This movie is actually the first in a series of other films that all occur in the same realm. In each, a piece of the world is revealed and the action grows more intense.

Other important films are actually book adaptations, for example, *The Vampire Chronicles* and the *Twilight Series*. *Interview with The Vampire* was adapted from the book by the same title and has the same plot overall that the novel does. A few important additions have been made, for example, dating the start of the story in 1791 and showing that Louis has truly seen his bicentennial. This film is still a classic vampire movie in 2013 and that is because the storyline closely follows the novel's. The portrayal of the vampire only adds to the film and provides a timeless look at a creature that knows time better than any human.

The *Twilight Saga*, on the other hand, will never win any awards for being a great vampire film series. The adaptation to the big screen only made the dialogue and plot line seem even more ridiculous. Unfortunately, the films have only fueled the flames for those who are diehard fans of the books. Critical viewers see that Robert Pattinson is uncomfortable as a vampire that can be read as a fluid character; yes, he understands the brooding of the character, but he lacks the romantic elements necessary to give the films a little more positive feedback (the same can be said for Kristin Stewart).

Another criticism of the films is the terrible quality of the special effects that are meant to emphasize the vampires' amazing abilities. An example of the poor quality of special effects is when the vampire characters must use their superhuman speed. The actors simply look as if they are running on treadmills, rather than interacting with the forest. This detracts greatly from the

films and does not create a world where vampires “feel” real. Perhaps the film crew did not have much to work with, but these films will never be considered classic, by any means.

### Television

As far as vampires in television go, viewers cannot find anything more classic than *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Buffy Summers, played by Sarah Michelle Gellar, starts the series as a 16 year-old girl who was expelled from her old school due to violence resulting from her being “the slayer.” The slayer is a young girl who has the abilities to match the speed and strength of vampires and other creatures like demons and witches (Gellar, Brendon and Hannigan). Throughout the series, audiences watch as Buffy goes through love and heartbreak, and fights between life and death, generally what everyone else goes through. Only what she experiences is made more difficult by the addition of her fighting against creatures from hell.

The vampires in the series are the most dominant characters, with the focus on Buffy and her friends, for understandable reasons (the name is in the title). The vampires here generally have no extra superpowers that make them unique; rather it is some of their physical characteristics that make them stand out. When vampires are not in their “blood thirsty mode,” they can pass as humans, but when they become aroused by blood and violence their faces change so that they become absolutely horrifying. Early in the show, Buffy’s friend Angel (who happens to be a vampire) explains to Buffy that when humans are changed into vampires a demon enters their bodies and suppresses their human nature (Gellar, Brendon and Hannigan). This is what makes vampires blood thirsty, vicious creatures.

There is only one way that a vampire may regain his mortal soul. There is an old ritual that was used by gypsies that traps and forces the demon out of a vampire. This was usually done when a vampire had committed a wrong against a family member. Angel had turned a gypsy into



a vampire after tormenting her to the point of madness. So the gypsies gave him his soul back and he was overcome with grief and guilt at all he had done over the years he had been a vampire.

As with any other fantasy, Buffy's world is full of multiple types of creatures, so vampires are not her only concern. In the community of Sunnydale there are also wiccans, werewolves, and humans that plague the town. With the help of her friends Willow and Xander and her watcher, Giles, Buffy is able to overcome the forces of evil and live an otherwise normal life.

*True Blood* (2008) is another television show that has helped to make vampires familiar figures in culture. This show portrays vampires in a particularly sexually attractive light. The series is based on *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* by Charlaine Harris, which focuses on the misadventures of the main character. Sookie Stackhouse is the average small town southern girl, except for the fact that she can read minds. Early in the series she discovers that there are other things to be worried about than what she hears from the townspeople: there are vampires in town. The first of these is Bill Compton, a southern gentleman who was turned into a vampire shortly after the end of the American Civil War. Throughout the series she falls in and out of love with many preternatural men, including werewolves and vampires.

The show does an amazing job of showing the vampire society and its hierarchy. With a government system in place, it is essential that rules be enforced. The power struggle between vampires is a focal point of the events that Sookie becomes embroiled in due to her powers. A twist to the story is that vampires do not get any more amazing than what Bram Stoker's vision of vampires was; instead it is humans that are given the supernatural powers. There are other telepaths in the series besides Sookie, and the witches. *True Blood* is an excellent example of the



sexualization of vampires. There is a seductive force behind the eyes of vampires that is very difficult to not fall into.

### Modern Vampirism

Modern vampirism in reality rather than literature is a topic that needs to be labeled “If squeamish, look away,” and for understandable reasons. There are documented cases of violence related to vampirism. In 1959, there was a gang in New York’s Hells Kitchen called the Vampires (Jenkins 28). The gang went around and stabbed people. Though not directly related to the act of consuming human blood, their leader did wear a cloak similar to that worn by Béla Lugosi in *Dracula*.

Another case of violence occurred in 1996 when a group of teenagers murdered a girl’s parents as a result of a role-playing game (Jenkins 28). The title of the game was *Vampire: The Masquerade* and it had amassed a large following. The group strengthened itself by “cutting themselves with razors and drinking one another’s blood” (Jenkins 28). In other documented cases, people were similarly brainwashed or even developed psychological disorders.

There is another facet to modern vampirism that does not have anything to do with violence. It is more like a lifestyle, a fetish in which people drink blood for psychological and sexual pleasure. *National Geographic* actually follows this taboo subject and in short films people are documented actually using razors to drink the blood of those who are willing. There are many medical checks that the donors go through to ensure that they do not carry any blood-born pathogens, but after that they are free to donate a few mouthfuls of blood to those who need it. Though it is a chilling idea, there are those who take great satisfaction from participating in such activities.

## Conclusion

Now that the myths and characteristic of vampires have been considered, there are but two questions remaining. The first of these is where did vampires come from? Many have taken a stab at answering this question and each idea is more ludicrous than the one before it. A popular belief is that vampires are the results of an epidemic, which led to their becoming a new epidemic themselves. A possible belief for the reintroduction of vampires into society stems from Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend*. The idea is that in the future an especially powerful bacterial strain will overwhelm the human population and turn them into blood sucking creatures.

One theory states that rabies could be the cause of vampire myths (Jenkins 15). This seems strange until one looks at the symptoms. When any animal contracts rabies, it goes rabid. Other symptoms increase the body's senses and quite honestly someone's reflection would be quite horrid because they would be foaming at the mouth and exhibiting other symptoms of rabies (Jenkins 15). So it would be completely understandable if a vampire wished to avoid looking in a mirror. Of course if rabies is not the answer, there are multitudes of other diseases that could persuade the skeptical. For example, there are people who have severe allergic reactions to sun exposure. This certainly is an example of a condition that could have generated the vampire myths. The creation of the vampire myth, human fear and superstition have certainly nourished and strengthened the idea.

The second question that is left is the following: why are vampires so attractive to humans? There are multitudes of possible answers, but because no research has been done to find this answer, only assumptions and guesses can be made. A possible answer IS that humans are drawn to look at the forbidden. Humans are also endlessly curious about the nature of evil, and

vampires often represent that which humans despise about themselves and others. Therefore vampires become a logical place to lay the blame for reprehensible actions and events.

There is also the case of sexual attraction. Freudians could have a field day with all of the sexual references that are made in these tales. Vampires can be used as a way to express what seems forbidden to humans. In American society, talking about sexual intercourse is frowned upon. Not because it is not a natural thing to do, but because mainstream Americans are often prudish. Society feels all right about imposing something like sex onto the icon of the vampire.

The human imagination is a wonderful and limitless gift. Using it, people weave stories that explain so many things that are otherwise left unexplained. This is how myths are created and why they continue to be an influence on society. In time, myths grow and change, and much the same can be said about humans, too. This may explain why the vampire literature has experienced change over time.

No matter who or where someone is, a question about vampires is bound to receive many answers. The answers will vary, but have a common trend all the same. Vampires are blood-sucking creatures of the night. They can turn into bats and are creatures that frighten people. Vampires are a popular figure in horror and they will remain as such.

Vampires are an expression of cultural belief. This is evident in the many different myths about this creature that exist. As an extension of human expression, the vampire is useful. Humans may use it as a focus for uncomfortable topics, like death and lust. It is thanks to the first writers of the subgenre that the vampire became prolific in today's popular culture. Today humans may not put much emphasis on myth, but the stories that are created in multiple forms of media give important insights to today's cultures.

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